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SUBJECT: IN POLITICS DOMINATED BY GIANTS, REFORMERS ARE
VULNERABLE

REF: A. 07 KABUL 3498
[1](#)B. KABUL 667

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The number of Afghan political parties has grown dramatically since the fall of the Taliban. Though small party leaders often explore coalitions and alliances, two primary competing blocs are emerging: the United Front opposition, and a looser coalition around Karzai. Both groups are courting prospects across the range of wholly new political parties and various splinter groups. The United Front offers small parties a voice in the National Assembly and promises leaders positions in a future government. Karzai dangles improved government services, government jobs and sinecures. The competition has increasingly left reformers, who are unwilling to choose between what they consider two unattractive alternatives, isolated, powerless, and at risk of irrelevance.

Whales Hunt the Little Fish

[1](#)2. (SBU) Political parties have proliferated since the fall of the Taliban; over eighty have registered with the Ministry of Justice. Most of these are either fragments of old parties or jihadi groups, whose ambitious leaders struck out on their own, or new parties founded by often idealistic reformers who returned to Afghanistan after 2001. Palace Policy Advisor Sebgatullah Sanjar categorizes today's parties in four groups: pre-communist, such as Afghan Millat; jihadi, such as Jamiat (Rabanni); ethnic, such as Junbesh (Uzbek); and newly emerging, such as the 3rd Line (REF A). Despite the reformers, propensity for ideological politics, Afghanistan's political landscape remains dominated by personal and ethnic alliances. Various attempts by reformist parties to form more powerful political blocs have failed because of misgivings about the ideological compromise required of allies and leaders' unwillingness to cede personal power to a committee of parties.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Two expanding factions increasingly dominate Afghan politics, the United Front opposition and Karzai supporters. Both groups are focused on building pan-national electoral support, but remain ethnically dominated and operate largely

behind closed doors. Independent groups that refuse to align with one of these giants risk irrelevance and political oblivion.

Two Groups Canvassing for Electoral Support

¶4. (SBU) The United Front and President Karzai are competing in their efforts to entice weak and small parties into their respective camps. The United Front promises a voice in the National Assembly as well as access to power and positions in a future United Front-dominated government. Karzai, meanwhile, uses delivery of government services as a political lever, and awards sinecures to party leaders who refrain from criticizing him.

¶5. (SBU) Politics within the Hazara ethnic group (REF B) are a case study of Afghanistan's evolving political landscape. Prior to 2001, Hazaras relied heavily on the Wahdat party as a bulwark against the Taliban. Since the Taliban, however, ambitious Hazara leaders have established their own parties. Two chief Wahdat leaders, Haji Mohammad Mohaqqueq and Second Vice President Mohammad Karim Khalili, often fair-weather friends during the anti-Soviet jihad, created their own branches of Wahdat. Other political aspirants, meanwhile, took advantage of Wahdat's fragmentation to assert their authority. Ustad Mohammad Akbari established a new wing of Wahdat and Sayed Mustafa Kazemi (who was killed in the November 6, 2007 Baghlan sugar factory bombing) founded a new Hazara political faction, the National Power Party. Karzai and the United Front competed to pull these four leaders' parties into their orbits. The United Front, allegedly close to Iran, approached Akbari and Kazimi, also rumored to retain

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ties to Iran. Khalili and Mohaqqueq, who claim, perhaps to curry favor with us, to have broken with Iran, sought a strong ally to compete with Akbari and Kazimi, and sided with Karzai.

Different Groups, Different Means of Outreach

¶6. (SBU) The United Front bloc operates politically even though it has not officially registered as a party with the Minister of Justice. Sayed Jawad Hossaini, leader of the Young Islamic Party of Afghanistan, founded in 2002, explained his party's recruitment by the United Front. Hossaini said he refused several entreaties to join the United Front in 2007, but ultimately decided to accept in early 2008. He based his decision on the need to join a larger group in order to have any voice in government. The United Front also offered him a seat on its controlling leadership council. Hossaini added he does not agree with some United Front positions, such as support for the Amnesty law, but nonetheless felt it politically advantageous to join the group.

¶7. (SBU) President Karzai, who does not have a party and has rejected several parties' solicitations, still trades in offers of government positions, sinecures and services in exchange for political support or acquiescence. Fatema Nazeri, a Hazara member of parliament from Kabul, explained her fledgling party's affiliation to Karzai. At her first political event, Nazeri staged a protest against the government because her supporters' neighborhood lacked electricity. Karzai responded, quickly offering electricity, but apparently at a price. Despite her initial position in opposition to the government, Nazeri explained she has since become close to Farouk Wardak, Karzai's political fixer. Nazeri implied she bartered political support for electricity.

The Disorganized but Fertile Middle

¶8. (SBU) Parties unwilling to choose a side in this ongoing

duel form a strong democratic current in Afghan politics, but complain they have no political voice or financial means. These are new parties run by reformers, most of whom left Afghanistan during the wars, some of whom stayed to run NGOs and schools. Their leaders abhor Afghanistan's tribal politics, shun its warlords, and complain that Iran, Pakistan, and Russia are meddling in domestic politics. Though reformers share these complaints, they remain unable to swallow their differences and unite. Their reluctance to work together prevents them from building a political bloc that could offer Afghans an alternative to the United Front or President Karzai. Until reformers can cooperate to the degree necessary to win real political power, however, Afghans will likely gravitate towards one of the two big players.

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